

Une diplomatie culturelle dans les tensions internationales: La France en Europe centrale et orientale (1936–1940/1944–1951). By Annie Guénard-Maget. Bruxelles–Bern–Berlin–Frankfurt am Main–New York–Oxford–Vienna: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2014. 364 pp.

The book by Annie Guénard-Maget examines the roles and forms of French cultural diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe in the period between 1936 and 1940, on the one hand, and 1944 and 1951, on the other. In other words, she deals with the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II, right up to France's surrender, and the period after the war, during which the region, under Soviet influence, had undergone a drastic transformation and the new frameworks of power had become rigid. One of Guénard-Maget's points of departure is the idea that in the 1920s and 1930s the region was a priority for French foreign policy, and it remained a priority after 1945, when Paris again sought to position itself as a great power. In order to ensure the coherence of her inquiry, Guénard-Maget examines six states that fell under Soviet influence in 1944 and 1945: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria. In the years immediately preceding and immediately following the war, this region was one of the main objects and sites of international tension. Thus, it constitutes an ideal subject for an examination of the ways in which the French state used varying tools in varying ways in its diplomatic efforts, in particular with regards to culture as an implement in foreign policy.

In this book, Guénard-Maget uses the term cultural diplomacy in a broad sense, and she examines not only the activities of the traditional intelligentsia and university communities, but also the roles of the natural sciences and technology, information politics, and propaganda. Her research is closely tied to the most recent French schools of the study of international relations. In his preface to the book, Robert Frank situates it quite clearly in the frameworks of French and international scholarship. Antoine Marès began to study French cultural diplomacy and the French presence in the 1980s. Marès also leads the research program on the mediators and sites of mediation of knowledge of Central Europe (the region that falls between German and Russian territories) that was formulated in France in the twentieth century. Guénard-Maget's book is a significant contribution to this work. The series entitled "Enjeux internationaux," in the framework of which this book was recently published, is similarly groundbreaking in the historiography on international relations. It takes

the work of Pierre Renouvin, who examines the economic and cultural tools with which a state pursues its interests, as its point of departure.

Guénard-Maget divides the book into two sections, each of which presents one of the two periods in question. These sections are further divided into chapters on sub-periods. Each of the two periods began with significant challenges for French cultural diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1936, France had to struggle to counter the influence of Nazi Germany in the region, and in 1944 and 1945, the Soviet Union, which had grown stronger over the course of the war, was the primary competitor for influence. Each of the two periods concluded essentially with a complete loss of French cultural influence in the region. In her conclusions, Guénard-Maget offers a persuasive comparison of the two periods, drawing attention both to similarities and differences. The tables in the appendix (presenting, for instance, the sums of money that were set aside in the French budget for cultural expansion for the individual countries of Central and Eastern Europe, broken down by year) and the five documents that are included clearly and eloquently illustrate the findings of her inquiry.

What were the similarities and the differences in French foreign policy in the region in the two periods? Was there any continuity? According to Guénard-Maget, in each of the two periods France pursued a genuine policy of cultural diplomacy initiated by the government and planned and structured strategically. In each of the two periods, French foreign policymakers drew clear distinctions among the target countries. The countries which at one time had been political and military allies, primarily Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania, were given particular attention. The continuity in policy in the two periods in question was further strengthened by the fact that in both cases cultural diplomacy was shaped by France's geopolitical interests and its desire either to strengthen or reestablish its influence in the face of the rise of totalitarian great powers. Furthermore, the agents of French cultural influence strove to achieve long-term influence both before and after the war. They therefore assigned considerable importance to the legal circumstances of French institutions, the educational system, and the provision of proper materials for the libraries.

Guénard-Maget also notes the essential differences between the two periods. She quite accurately observes that the geopolitical circumstances in Central and Eastern Europe had changed dramatically from France's perspective. In the middle of the 1930s, France was, at least apparently, an influential great power with four allies in the region. However, following the Munich Agreement, the French surrender in 1940, and the rise of the Vichy government, the status of

Paris became highly questionable. Thus, in the first period, cultural diplomacy was more of a tool that complemented political, economic, and military elements of France's foreign policy. However, in the second period under discussion, culture became the primary and indeed almost only tool with which France could assert its presence in the region, essentially replacing all other factors. The fact that members of the younger generation were given important positions in French cultural diplomacy was a symptom of the attempt to adapt to the new circumstances in 1944 and 1945. Members of this younger generation represented the "progressive direction" of a "renewed" France. The target audience was no longer exclusively the elites, as essentially had been the case before, but rather the "people," from whom France expected the new leaders to be drawn. Another sign of the "winds of democracy" was the increasingly palpable tendency among the people responsible for ensuring France's cultural presence in the region to negotiate with their Central and Eastern European partners on the basis of equality and mutual reciprocity. The cultural accords, mixed committees, and appearance of new bilateral societies (which represented something of an innovation) were all signs of this tendency.

The sources on which the author has drawn are impressive in their quantity but also peculiarly one-sided. The collected archival materials are remarkably rich and could even be regarded as almost exhaustive. With regards to the materials held in the archive of the French Foreign Ministry, Guénard-Maget diligently studied the documents of the divisions responsible for cultural expansion, as well as the dossiers documenting relations between France and the six countries. For instance, of the materials available in the national archive (CARAN), she examined the documents of the secretary of the office of the prime minister, and she also studied materials available in the archives of the Institut d'Études Slaves and the Alliance française. The archival documents are complemented by the interviews which Guénard-Maget conducted with people who had been responsible for French diplomatic and cultural policy in Eastern Europe after World War II. However, her examination of French cultural diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe is made a bit one-sided by the fact that Guénard-Maget makes almost no reference whatsoever to archival materials held in any of the countries of the region. Indeed, she makes almost no use of the secondary literature in French on these sources. (For instance, with regards to Hungary, she could have offered a more subtle understanding of French cultural diplomacy had she consulted works by Viktória Müller, Anikó Macher, Gergely Fejérdy and Sarolta Klenjánszky.) Her description of the acquisition of influence by

Germany and Italy is based exclusively on French documents. Thus, Guénard-Maget offers a detailed discussion of French cultural expansion in Central and Eastern Europe in the two periods under discussion, from the emergence of the French vision for the region to the attempts to realize this vision on the local level (including assessments of France's influence), but her sketch of the broader international context is incomplete and therefore sometimes misleading.

From time to time, the reader comes across oversimplifications in the book, which may be due at least in part to the fact that it is only one-third as long as the original dissertation on which it is based. For instance, in her introduction to the first section, the author does not emphasize that French foreign policy failed after the First World War to create a system of economically and militarily strong allies that could have been used against Germany, even if appearances suggested this. The approach that emerged following the withdrawal of Russia from the alliance in 1917, an approach that rested on the victorious small state allies, was based on an illusion. France's new partners were not real allies, and even as a block they did not represent a military or economic power comparable with the army or economy of a great power. Nonetheless, Guénard-Maget's book constitutes an indispensable contribution to the study of French cultural diplomacy and relations between France and Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. It also provides a fine complement to the secondary literature on the Sovietization of the region.

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